

Postcolonialism and Early Childhood Education in Small Island States*

Anna Baldacchino

University of Malta

abald05@um.edu.mt

Abstract: The impact of postcolonialism on primary, secondary and tertiary education in small island states (SIS), is well documented. This study explores the origins and character of colonial lingering in the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (ECE) in SIS, with special reference to Malta and Grenada, both former British colonies. Interviews, observations and focus groups have been conducted in both countries. An online questionnaire was completed by 64 individuals residing in the world's 27 small island states, (and of which 20 secured independence from Britain).

The research findings suggest a colonial lingering in ECE in small island states. Manifestations of this include: the preference for school uniforms; the widespread use of standard English as the language of instruction; a top-down pedagogy that obliges an early start to schooling; a strong focus on literacy and numeracy in the early years; restrictions in play-based learning; and story books, weather and alphabet charts that are not necessarily relevant to the country's culture and tradition and written in the English language, even though both countries have their own vernacular.

The findings encourage a sober and critical reflection of the policies and practices governing ECE in SIS.

Keywords: Malta, Grenada, Early Childhood Education, Small Island States, Postcolonialism

Introduction

The world's various small island states tend to have a high population density (Briguglio, 2003; Lutz, 1994; Srinivasan 1986). This empirical observation, enhanced by its widespread social perception, in turn contributes to a greater, keener sense of competition in most aspects of social, economic and professional life. These contextual variables instigate and

encourage a strong belief in certification and educational achievement as the main vehicle of social mobility (Sultana, 2006). There is also the aspect of neo-colonialism and the lingering British influence on the educational systems of some of these countries (including Malta) with, for example, a social class-tinged undervaluing of vocational training. The acute race for certification in order to secure what are understood as scarce, well-paying and prestigious jobs plays a part in this educational 'rat race' as well (Brock, 1988; Palmer, 2015).

I have critically been observing the practice of early childhood education in various settings during my travels – including the Caribbean, Australia, Sweden, Japan and Taiwan. But it has been in Malta and Barbados that I have noted the keenest intent by both educators and parents to encourage a 'schooling' approach even in early years settings, where childcare and kindergarten settings are looked upon more as a preparation setting for school and schooling generally. Some burning questions kept cropping up: is it a coincidence that these two are both small island states, with the highest population density in their respective regions (Mediterranean, Caribbean) and both ex-colonies of Britain? Why is there such a difference between countries and the way educators teach young children? Why do young children wear uniforms in some countries but not in others? Why are they exam-driven in some, including Malta, but not in other states? Through the visits to childcare/kindergarten settings in other countries I started to notice that there might be one thing in common with the top-down education model: those implementing such an approach tended to be small island states that had been colonised by Britain. Could this have left an impact on the way educators teach? Or are there other factors that influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education in small island states? These questions led me to my doctoral research questions:

1. What elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education (2 to 5-year-olds) in small island states?
2. What impact, if any, has colonialism had on early childhood education in small island states, and how is that impact manifested in the current postcolonial epoch?

To answer the above research questions, I chose a largely qualitative research method drawing upon the mixed methods triangulation principles as outlined by Creswell and Clark (2011). Data were collected from Malta and Grenada. These two countries have been specifically chosen since both are

former British colonies that were under British rule for nearly two centuries. Their land area is also very similar, each comprising of an archipelago of three inhabited islands. Both countries became independent around the same, Malta in 1964 and Grenada in 1974. Grenada and Malta are the 10th and 11th smallest countries in the world respectively by land area (N = 219; Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a; 2018b).

Five different methods of data collection were used for this study:

1. Observations in four childcare/kindergarten settings: two in Malta and two in Grenada
2. Interviews with head of schools; kindergarten teachers, childcare centre directors and early childhood educators in the two countries
3. Four focus groups with parents of children taking part in my study (two in each country)
4. A research journal, which could capture instances that may not be documented otherwise
5. An online questionnaire which was distributed to a select number of inhabitants from each of the 27 small island states around the world with a current resident population size of less than one million (Table I).

Small island states with a population of less than a million (N = 27)

Caribbean Sea	Pacific Ocean	Indian Ocean	Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea
Antigua & Barbuda (UK)	Federated States of Micronesia (US)	Comoros (F)	Cape Verde (P)
Bahamas (UK)	Fiji Islands (UK)	Maldives (UK)	Cyprus (UK)
Barbados (UK)	Kiribati (UK)	Seychelles (UK)	Iceland (D)
Dominica (UK)	Marshall Islands (US)		Malta (UK)
Granada (UK)	Nauru (UK)		São Tomé & Príncipe (P)
St Kitts - Nevis (UK)	Palau (US)		
St Lucia (UK)	Samoa (UK)		
St Vincent & the Grenadines (UK)	Solomon Islands (UK)		
	Tonga (UK)		
	Tuvalu (UK)		
	Vanuatu (UK/F)		

Table I - Former colonial power are in brackets:

D - Denmark F - France P - Portugal UK - United Kingdom US - United States

Education in Small Island States

Literature about education in small (mainly island) states has picked up of late. However, there has so far been a systematic failure by small state studies to engage with and integrate the field of early childhood education (ECE) – child care and kindergarten before the onset of formal primary school – into academic and policy debates. This paper is based on doctoral research, investigating the general challenges facing Early Childhood Education in small island states, and deploying perspectives gleaned largely from both postcolonial studies as well as island and small state studies. It intends to contribute to a better understanding of what influences ECE practices and pedagogies in SIS and how we can overcome challenges, if any, in the future.

Most small island states are found aggregated in specific parts of the world. There are clusters of such islands particularly in the Caribbean, the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Smaller groups of such island states can also be found in the Mediterranean, the North Atlantic and off the coast of West Africa (Brock, 1988). The meaning of ‘small’ varies across time and literature, and depends on who is providing the definition. Cut-off points usually reflect specific interests of the research under way. For the purpose of my research ‘small’ island states are defined in terms of two dimensions: resident population size and full sovereignty (meaning full political independence). The one million resident population benchmark was chosen for my research, amounting to a total of 27 small island states (Table I).

Apart from resident population size, various other factors have been proposed to define SIS, including “...ecology, vulnerability to external shocks, limited human and natural resources, nature of their economies, cost per capita of services and dependence on trade” (Jules, 2012, pp.6-7). Bray and Packer (1993) contend that economics, education, politics, sovereignty, national security and vulnerability issues form part of the characteristics of SIS. Because of this vulnerability, they argue further that the development needs of SIS should be looked at differently from those of larger states. Pillay and Elliot (2005, p. 88) contend:

To apply the same parameters of development to these small island states ignores the fact that small states are not just quantitatively different in their characteristics: they are qualitatively different.

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank Task Force (2000) point to other factors that impact on small island states. These include: remoteness; proneness to natural disasters and environmental changes; isolation; poverty and limited access to external funds (Atchoarena et al., 2008; Briguglio, 1995). While these are all similar distinct features of SIS, one has to keep in mind that some aspects of diversity within these states persist, for example their history and culture. "Area, geography and proximity to other states" (Bray, 1991, p.18) differ from one small island state to another. For example, the land area may be quite small for some states while for others it can be quite large.

Bray (1992) concludes that small states are not so diverse from the medium-sized and large states: "They [small states] exist in an interdependent world, and in many cases operate within a legacy from a colonial past" (p.16). However, Baldacchino (1997) contends that: "proclaiming that a small scale society is nevertheless a total society suggests that there is practically the same absolute total of institutions and official capacities one is bound to find in a larger state" (p.69).

This may not always be the case however, as will be discussed in the next section which reviews some of the strengths and weaknesses of small island states.

Strengths and weaknesses of Small Island States

Small states are not simply scaled down versions of larger states. Amongst the specific advantages and disadvantages of operating in a small state, one comes across the tendency for excessive intimacy, for monopoly or expertise and for role multiplicity.

Baldacchino (1997) contends that the role of multiplicity "...role enlargement, as well as natural monopoly by the system incumbents" (p.69) increases because of the small scale factor. Sultana (2006) argues that it becomes quite easy for a person in a small island state to become an 'expert' in a particular area depending on the necessity and the opportunities that arise. That person will switch to other 'expert' hats when the situation changes, or the position is terminated and calls for a different type of expertise. This is known as "flexible specialisation" (Sultana 2006, p.31). One of the Maltese respondents involved in this study states:

...Today you may be an expert on this and tomorrow on something else, and sometimes quality is suffering from this...because the real expertise is too expensive or simply missing sometimes. The pressure is there for sure. Because we do not have an expert for every department, we have often to inform ourselves in reading about different themes. The problem with this is that once you have read three books about a theme, you are 'an expert', and this is not correct.

This is also argued by Baldacchino (1997) where he states that, “as soon as individuals develop even a modest edge in an area of knowledge, skill or research, they may find themselves proclaimed as experts and are ascribed with authoritative standing in that area by others” (p.73). This raises the question of whether this is also happening in the ECE field in SIS and how it might be impacting on its practice. Are the newly fledged experts being placed in a position for which they may not yet have proper or thorough training? If yes, how does this reflect on the quality of the education being offered in early childhood?

It is important to acknowledge that human resources may be too scarce and valuable in SIS to be wasted. This in turn leads to multi-functionalism, and flexibility in employment. According to Sultana (2006) multi-functionality “is a direct result of the nature of labour markets in small states, where some of the sectors have to perform the whole range of tasks that their counterparts do in larger states” (p.32).

Although these instances are likely to be found in larger countries, Bray and Fergus (1986) argue that in Montserrat, for example, it is a means of survival: the economy needs personnel to take on the jobs but usually there are not enough skilled persons to fill up these positions. This might well also be the case in early childhood education in SIS as it is still evolving and trying to professionalise itself as a legitimate part of the teaching profession. From personal experience, I can say that this happens in childcare centres here in Malta where practitioners wear multiple hats, such as the case when the Director of a childcare setting can also have the role of carer, administrator, accountant and cleaner. In larger states, you can have specialised staff so each person can take up a particular role for most of the time, whereas in smaller states, staff have to be multi-functional due to the lack of human resources. The issue of ‘quickly hitting the limelight’ in SIS may be viewed as a benefit as well. Since the human resource pool is quite limited and cannot be selective, the use of such ‘experts’ will lessen the burden on the SIS economy.

This can be seen in the results of a study of higher educational institutions in SIS conducted by Baldacchino (1997). One respondent, an academic, had this to say about this matter (p.74):

The person in a small state is like a premier capital good, a premier national resource. You would need an army of experts [in a particular subject] elsewhere. But one person in Grenada would suffice. (Academic at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados)

The downside of this is that this situation also lends itself to having less specialised personnel, especially in the early childhood sector. It may also lead to having job descriptions that are drawn up such as to fit the individual being employed (Bray, 1991). Ultimately, this could also lead to favouritism and patronage (Sultana, 2006).

Baldacchino (2012) proposes ‘intimacy’ as one of the variables of what he calls the “small scale syndrome” (p.17). He argues that in SIS, the level of privacy is quite low; there is a high level of familiarity between individuals; whom you know may be more important than what you know; and role multiplicity simply cannot be avoided. Briguglio (2003) also argues that small island states are usually more densely populated and have close-knit communities.

This might lead one to believe that communication is an easy day-to-day process. However, this might not be the case because people might feel threatened by their neighbours as it is easy for these persons to know everything (sometimes even personal issues) about them, so they tend to withhold information, also because of the rat-race for jobs in small island states. For example, if a person is up for a promotion or has applied for a job, the tendency is to keep it private because this person fears that, if other people get to know about it, they themselves may decide to apply for the same post and get it instead. This might well be one factor of small island states that impacts on the practice of early childhood education. The credentials of an individual applying for a job within an ECE setting might not prove to be enough to merit them the job, especially in private run childcare settings, as much as knowing a person/s who can vouch for them in that particular setting. This may in turn lead to low-quality service due to a lack of professionalism. Close-knit communities usually face some problems with allotting jobs as those who cannot secure a job are disappointed and may become bitter and jealous of those members of the community who are successful (Bacchus, 1993).

This continues to exist even in the 21st century. Greater opportunities for misuse or abuse of the system through ‘friends-of-friends’ networking seem to occur on SIS (Baldacchino, 1997). Since the size of the social field is small in SIS, there comes into play a condition of ‘managed intimacy’ (Lowenthal, 1987). To permit such a society to perform with less stress, ‘small-scale citizens minimize or mitigate conflict’ (Baldacchino, 1997, p.77):

Small-scale inhabitants learn to get along, like it or not, with one another, knowing that they are likely to renew and reinforce relationships with the same persons in a variety of contexts over a whole lifespan.

Familiarity breeds contempt, however, as states an English proverb. Inter-personal relationships can also cause ‘intense rivalry’ which utilizes energy that might otherwise be used on more important issues (Bray and Fergus, 1986). This can be damaging to both individuals and organisations. Thus, when individuals realise that disputes may occur at any time and they will have to pay dearly for them should that happen, they instead try to subdue these conflicts and try to get along with each other (Sultana 2006; Baldacchino, 1997).

Similar problems do arise in larger societies but, it is easier in these societies to pick up a dispute with someone that you might not come across again. To have such conflicts with people that you come across face-to-face on a regular and sometimes daily basis is quite another matter.

Research on Education in Small Island States

Education continues to be a major resource and investment in human capital for SIS. Their citizens can migrate to other countries and use their “skill sets, their qualifications, [and] their language proficiencies” (Baldacchino, 2012, p.20), which in turn will provide remittances for their small state’s economy. Bray and Fergus (1986) argue, however, that such research tends to deal with educational issues that happen to unfold in small states, rather than ‘ones which arise because those states are small’ (p.91).

Most of the research on education in SIS that I have come across dealt with primary, secondary and higher education issues. As research about pre-primary (early childhood education) within an SIS context was scarce, I decided to embark on this research in the hope of adding knowledge about

this subject. In my opinion, the lack of literature might be due to the fact that, when literature about education and small island states started emerging in the 1980s, ECE was not yet considered to be an important issue, its practice was not yet widely institutionalised and its staff was not rigorously professionalised. Another reason might be that, in SIS, especially those with small populations and close knit communities, relatives or members of the community themselves usually took care of the youngest until they reached formal school age.

Pillay and Elliott (2005) call for a redefinition of the education system and its management in small island states: they challenge education planners to “move beyond the stereotypical ways of thinking about education development while acknowledging the role played by previous educational development models” (p. 87). This cannot be achieved if one keeps looking at education models through an old, narrow, continent-driven lens. While this can be said of all societies, it is predominantly true for SIS where resources are limited, and colonialism could have left a long and deep impact on the local educational systems (Pillay & Elliott 2005). An example of such neo-colonialism is the processing of applications for senior academic promotions at the University of Malta. According to Baldacchino in an interview carried in *The Sunday Times*:

Applications for promotion to associate or full professor are sent to the Association of Commonwealth Universities, [in London] which then determines the process of adjudication, inclusive of the identification of suitable referees. Its recommendations are then sent back to Malta (Massa 2016, p. 9).

Brock (1988) talks about the “centre-periphery” concept of various small island states and argues that “campus islands” – those with an institution of higher education – benefit over their sister and non-campus islands (p.171). A case in point is the Maltese archipelago, with Malta (a campus island) and Gozo (the peripheral island). Most Gozitan students who wish to continue with tertiary education have to either go to the main Malta Campus of the University of Malta or travel to a foreign country. Brock (1988) mentions Caribbean and South Pacific small island states as examples of the centre-periphery concept, and argues that in these cases “there is no doubt that the campus islands have benefitted disproportionately” (p.171). In spite of being a sovereign state, Grenada, is also a peripheral island in the Caribbean as far as tertiary education is concerned. The local Community College does not

grant degrees. Grenadians wanting to further their education need to go to Barbados, Jamaica or Trinidad and their University of the West Indies campuses or else travel to other countries.

Lack of resources is one factor that challenges education in SIS. Due to the absence of economies of scale and limited population, it is hard for SIS to viably produce their own educational materials and resources (for example text-books, flashcards and worksheets). It is often not cost-effective or realistic to produce these materials and keep them updated (Sultana, 2006). This means that educational materials and resources are often imported from foreign countries that carry with them a foreign curriculum. They do not usually come in the native language of the SIS that is using them and may not comply with the traditions, cultures and beliefs of these states. This poses the question of how developmentally and culturally appropriate these imported resources are in the early childhood education (ECE) settings of SIS. Consider planning an activity for a 'winter' theme by providing children with a snowflake picture to colour, when children in that particular country have never experienced snow and when a snowflake is actually white!

Personal experience suggests that, because of this lack of human resources, certain posts in educational services are occupied by individuals who do not necessarily specialise in the field, especially where early childhood is concerned. This usually inhibits change from taking place as the knowledge of the policy makers and stakeholders in the field is limited. Farrugia (1991) and Briguglio, Persaud and Stern (2006) argue that the lack of human resources is a constant source of frustration in small countries. Malta is a case in point: as a sovereign state, it has to have an effective educational administration, one which offers those basic services and facilities that are needed in and expected of any country, irrespective of size. Farrugia (1991) contends that the actual number of personnel employed in the education sector in Malta is obviously much less than, for example, in Italy. However, in spite of a disproportionately large Maltese complement the human resources are not always adequate. Critical mass constraints invariably bloat the size of public administrations in small states.

Culture and its impact on the curriculum is significant in small island states. From history we know that societies and their cultures change through time. Some traditions persist or evolve, but others get phased out and new ones take over. Some small countries such as Fiji in the South Pacific, Trinidad and

Tobago in the Caribbean and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean are not 'monocultural': these particular three all have a strong Indian ethnic presence in their populations (Pillay & Elliott, 2005; Srebrnik, 2000). Many SIS depend on other developed countries for their economy (e.g. tourism) which seems to imply that 'global culture' cannot be blocked out. Pillay and Elliott (2005) argue:

... the issue of traditional local and western cultures is not about which culture to adopt. Rather it is about how to provide a balance between the two so that the people from small developing countries still maintain an identity and yet can actively participate in the emerging global cultures. (p. 95)

This means that those SIS that have been following a curriculum inspired by their former colonisers, may have an advantage in being better able to navigate a globalised world. However, these same SIS also need to rethink and re-plan their curricula to better suit specific *local* circumstances and development needs (Lee & Hayden, 2009). A national curriculum needs to be an ongoing process which may however, present a challenge to SIS because of their limited resources (Pillay & Elliott, 2005). Curricula can no longer be developed on the basis of current importance or past models; they also need to be able (as it were) to see into the future. Curricula need to portray a pedagogy through which individuals are encouraged to keep an open mind towards change (Lee & Hayden, 2009; Pillay & Elliott, 2005).

Unfortunately, the educational system of SIS face imported curricula in contexts where educators may be insufficiently trained, expertise is hard to come by, pedagogies are crafted at a central level, and where decisions may be driven by person specificity.

Education policy makers in small island states need to consider moving away from the top-down system, where it is assumed that every school is the same and that what works for one school should work for another (Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Viruru, 2005a). The challenge is to move to a school-based model where "every school is unique and has a personality and culture of its own" (Pillay & Elliott, 2005, p. 102). Top-down education systems and their checklist of competences put pressure on early childhood education, and the educators of higher grades accordingly place high expectations on young children who are still in their developing stages. Sadly, this is leading to the 'schoolification' of early childhood education (Woodhead & Moss, 2007).

The next section will discuss the impact of postcolonialism on small island states, and in particular on their educational systems.

Postcolonialism

There has been a steady stream of literature about post colonialism, ever since the official ending of colonialism in various former colonies around the world and mainly in the period 1944 - 1984 (Hickling-Hudson & Mayo, 2012). Tikly (1999) defines postcolonialism as a universal 'condition' or change in political, economic and cultural provisions that "arises from the experiences of European colonialism, both in former colonised and colonising countries" (p. 605). Viruru (2005b), argues that post colonialism is concerned with: "addressing the legacy of colonialism imposed by western attempts to dominate the globe over hundreds of years" (p. 8). In its widest sense, post colonialism is an epistemological critique concerned with "challenging the unquestioned Eurocentric ways of looking at the world and seeks to open up intellectual spaces for those who are termed 'subalterns'" or alternative approaches to knowledge and practice (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 20). According to the famous Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986), colonialism not only imposes 'social production' but it also dominates the mentality of the colonised population:

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. (p. 16)

My search for relevant literature about the impact of postcolonialism on very young children, led me to two scholarly articles: Viruru (2005a) and Nieuwenhuys (2013). Viruru discusses how, in spite of the influential nature of the ideas that postcolonialism has to offer and its relative consequences to young children's lives, the literature only talks about a "slight if any impact on the field of early childhood as an academic discipline and even less on the daily practices of early childhood educators" (Viruru, 2005a, p. 8). This author explains how the idea of colonialism has been mainly modelled on specific authoritative and oppressive models of child rearing. Some prevailing principles of how children allegedly grow, learn and develop have become

“another of colonialism’s truths that permit no questioning, and that are imposed unhesitatingly upon people around the world for their own good” (Viruru, 2005a, p. 16).

On the other hand, Nieuwenhuys (2013) contends that the backbone of the drive to colonise was formed by the idea that Caucasians were the chosen ones pre-ordained to subjugate darker skinned people in faraway countries. The ongoing belief was that of a “civilising mission” (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 4): the colonised needed to be rescued and educated about their “alleged abuses, such as child marriages and infanticide that primitive or oriental men would visit upon children (and women)” (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 4). No wonder that Christian missionaries were an integral component of this mission. Nieuwenhuys adds that “colonialism and childhood are inseparably harnessed together for interpreting human life as a trajectory leading towards increasing and endless perfectibility” (p. 5). It was only by seeing both the child and the colonised as “vulnerable, passive and irrational” beings that the educated colonisers could justify their implementation of their noble cause (Nieuwenhuys, 2013, p. 5).

Clearly, the impacts of postcolonialism, both tangible and intangible, run deep in formerly colonised countries. They may run even deeper in small island states.

The implications of the impact of postcolonialism on education in SIS are numerous. However, Tarc (2009) argues that: “Postcolonial studies are slow to come to education, in part because postcolonial studies threaten to undo education, to unravel the passionately held-onto thought and knowledge of the modern Western-educated student and scholar” (p. 195).

Educational policy issues surrounding language use, curricular development and pedagogical styles have been, and are still being impacted by, the long and deep colonial experience of small island states. The inevitable need to accommodate global and local identities in SIS has a considerable impact on language use and policy, both in classrooms and society at large. Crossley and Tikly (2004) state that: “...colonial education has also facilitated the use of English and other ‘global’ (read European) languages as the medium through which discourses in comparative education are most often conducted” (p. 149). Thiong’o (1986) stresses that: “The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the

entire universe” (p. 4). The dominance of English, and all the more so in SIS, where 20 out of 27 countries were British colonies, will influence the structure of the education system, in that people may be required to learn foreign languages, sometimes to the detriment of local ones

ECE in Grenada and Malta

In Grenada, education is modelled on the British system and is free and compulsory between ages 6 and 14 (UNESCO, 2010). However, although universal primary education has been on the minds of Caribbean government for many years, it was during the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 that this was made official (Miller, 2014). In Grenada, pre-primary school was introduced in 1962 as a private endeavour, assisted by the government (UNESCO, 2010). The Education Act responsible for early childhood care and education programmes was amended in 1976. Pre-school education was included in the national primary education system by the government in the 1980s (UNESCO, 2010). At this time, a more structured system was introduced whereby pre-primary and nursery schools were regularised (Hickling-Hudson, 2006).

Primary education in Malta became obligatory in 1946 for children between the ages of 6 and 14. That is a full century after most European countries had made elementary education available to all. Secondary education in Malta accessible to all, came even later, in 1970. The pre-primary sector (including 3 and 4-year-olds) started providing for 4-year-olds in 1977 and for 3-year-olds in 1988 (Sollars, 2002). As for tertiary education, there were still just 400 university students in 1984 (Sultana, 1997). The number of students has increased significantly since then – from 6200 in 1995 to 11,500 in 2018 (University of Malta, 2018).

In spite of the tardiness of educational development, according to Sultana (1997), Malta compares well with other small island states like Cyprus, Fiji, Grenada and Barbados, whose characteristics are similar to Malta in that they have a low manufacturing capacity, limited natural resources and a similar scale of population. All four island states were British colonies and they secured their independence around the same time: between 1960 and 1974 (Sultana, 1997). The flipside of this however, is that, as in most developing countries, where development in educational systems occurred later than in industrially developed nations, Malta’s fast-tracked growth in educational

services may have been achieved at the expense of quality provision (Sultana, 1997).

To sum up, the situation in Malta has an uncanny resemblance to that in the Anglophone Caribbean. The language of instruction, educational curricula and textbook selection have been strongly impacted by colonial practices and their lingering effects post-independence. As a result, local culture and the Maltese language have been devalued and suffer low esteem (Camilleri Grima, 2018).

Findings Emerging from the Study

The emergent major findings of my research were the following:

- Particular challenges of scale influence, ECE in small island states, including the lack of appropriate and sufficient material and human resources, as well as a resort by individuals to multi-functionality.
- Training and support for educators in the ECE sector in the countries participating in this study is inadequate.
- Colonialism has impacted on the pedagogy and practice in ECE settings, the choice of the language of instruction and language of communication, the status of the local language or dialect, and the use of culturally inappropriate teaching material.

One unexpected finding came out whilst analysing language use. The data collected from Malta, Grenada and an online questionnaire suggested that the colonial language – which is English in 20 out of the 27 SIS – is used primarily for instruction in all but six small island states today. However, I was quite surprised to note that the native language was not always used as a means of communication at home: twenty out of the twenty-four parents who participated in the study in Malta and Grenada, contend that it was also rather purposefully used among adults when they did not want their children to understand what was being said.

Another unexpected finding was that Maltese interviewees younger than 50 years of age did not feel that there was any colonial impact on the educational system in Malta, while those older than 50 believed that colonialism did impact education. The former, younger participants commented that Malta had changed for the better over the years, especially in the educational sector.

This could be because these younger people have not lived and experienced colonialism, and so they have a different perspective of Malta.

In contrast, all Grenadian interviewees conceded that a colonial lingering was present in most aspects of their national educational system, including ECE. English is the undisputed means of instruction and communication in this country and the local creole is facing extinction.

Issues influencing the pedagogy and practice of ECE on SIS

Online questionnaire respondents, interviews with educators and parents' focus groups concurred that the challenges of early childhood education in small island states deal mainly with a lack of financial, human and material resources. The lack in funding and investment in ECE was also present in the analysis of this research and how this eventually leads to inadequately trained staff to fill the posts of early childhood educators, as well as to an obligation to multi-task rather than specialise. A gap also exists between the pedagogies that educators claimed they were practising in Grenadian and Maltese settings and what was actually observed 'in the field', as evidenced from my visits in the childcare/kindergarten settings. This related back to the lack of trained personnel in this sector and how this affected their pedagogy and practice.

The above elements influence the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education in SIS. Moreover, in a setting where corporal punishment was lawfully practised, there was more discipline and rigidity during learning opportunities and children's ideas and interests most often went unheeded or even punished if expressed. Nearly all respondents of the online questionnaire, the interviews and the focus groups agreed that a play-based approach is the most beneficial for children, and educators also concurred that they are aiming for a child-centred pedagogy. However, what is being claimed as ideal by participants is not necessarily what is being practised on the ground. On one hand, in Grenada, corporal punishment is still practised in some form in homes, childcare settings and schools; religion is very prominent in the teaching; and there is still a fundamentally traditional British school system in place. On the other hand, in Malta, corporal punishment in homes and education and care settings was abolished in 2013; religion remains a dominant social force, and there persists a school system that is mostly influenced by the traditional British model that was transferred from the British to the Maltese, with very little thought to the consequences it

would have on the local education system. Spiteri (2016) contends that: “throughout its 164-year colonial history as part of the British Empire...Malta was subject to a more or less uncritical process of educational policy transfer” (p. 299). Sultana (2006) and Cutajar (2008) also argue that the Maltese educational model was handed down by the British during colonial rule and, although some superficial changes have taken place over time, it continues to be mostly guided by different British education models (Borg & Mayo, 2015).

In the case of Grenada and the Caribbean in general, Jules (2010) suggests that education in the Caribbean over the past 25 years has passed through change and restructuring. Unfortunately, he continues, there were only a few instances when these pursued reforms led to a deep rethink of the meaning of education in a way that reflected the re-shaping of the post-independence Caribbean. The colonial impact did not exclude early childhood education on children from as young as two years of age (Prochner, 2009; May, Kaur, & Prochner, 2016).

The findings of this study suggest that major issues influencing the pedagogy and practice of ECE in small island states include: a relative lack of human resources; lack of funding; lack of adequate training; role multiplicity; and the disconnect between the pedagogy claimed to be practised and the one observed. I would argue that the last issue can only be solved if proper and adequate training is given to all those working in early childhood education (Payler & Davis, 2017). Findings from the online questionnaire suggest that provisions for such adequate training, especially in the 0-3-year-old child care, may not be in place in Malta. In Grenada and for most of the other 27 small island states in the world provision of such training is considered inadequate even in kindergarten settings.

I acknowledge that some of the above-mentioned issues related to pedagogy and practice in ECE could also be found in larger countries. However, I believe that the impact of these issues is felt more strongly in small island states because of their longer, deeper and more intimate experience of colonialism (Caldwell, Harrison, & Quiggin, 1980).

The Impact of Colonialism on ECE

The colonial impact lingers on: this has influenced early childhood education both in Malta and Grenada. My research suggests that this colonial lingering finds expression in the extensive use of the English language for

books, worksheets, textbooks, and as the language of instruction in schools; it may also serve as the preferred language spoken at home (especially in Grenada). Uniforms, dress codes and corporal punishment were also mentioned as part of the colonial impact.

Findings also suggests that, the colonial impact is more noticeable in Grenada than in Malta. Malta is a member of the European Union since 2004, unlocking the route to a new external reference point for both Maltese policy makers and the Maltese public at large; and one that is likely to be strengthened after the UK exists the EU in 2019. EU accession has also opened the door to more immigrants, largely EU nationals, coming to Malta and joining the labour force: their children are finding their way into the local childcare and school populations. Malta is now being more exposed to different cultures, languages and religions and is trying to find a way to assimilate these into the local community and classrooms (Camilleri Grima, 2018). This task is, in itself, creating new challenges, including the new status of Maltese as a foreign language for immigrant students in local schools (Gruppetta, 2018).

All this in turn can and does influence the pedagogy being implemented in both childcare centres and kindergartens in these two countries. Suggestively, the kindergarten and childcare settings of small island states are not exempt from a postcolonial lingering, just like educational settings at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the same countries.

When I first voiced the issue about the impact that colonialism might have on ECE during interviews with principals, directors and educators in childcare settings, most of them said that they had not really thought about this issue before. Reflecting on the question, they all agreed that there was still a colonial lingering, but that they had not necessarily thought about it in that way since its impact and effects, ingrained in the history and environment, have become part and parcel of the culture and traditions of the country and are so entangled in daily routines and epistemologies. This was a case where I was “making the familiar strange” to my participants (Clough, 2002; Kaomea, 2003; Mills, 1959; Shklovsky, 1965; Sikes, 2003), highlighting something that they had lived with but had not questioned critically.

Conclusion

My research may have nudged my participants to somewhat defamiliarise themselves with what they had been taking for granted, unsettling their epistemic composure. They may now be looking at post colonialism in a different way and possibly making new efforts to introduce more local resources and embrace more fully the pedagogies that they claimed to be implementing. Childcare and Kindergarten (0-5 years) should be integrated under one Ministry, preferably that for Education, to enhance regularisation of the sector and a common early years policy (This recommendation applies to 19 out of the participating 27 SIS whose childcare sector falls under the Ministry of Social Services). Educators in these small island states should be made aware of the impact of colonialism on the early years environment. This would hopefully instigate them to reconsider the design of their settings and revise their own practice in ways that better fit the identities and developmental aspirations of their own countries. This can be achieved by using contextualised and culturally sensitive materials in their settings

Citizens of small island states deserve to be made aware of such colonial residues which are still quite visible in our classrooms and childcare settings...for those who have the eyes to see them.

References

- Atchoarena, D., Dias Da Graca, P., & Marquez, J.M. (2008). Strategies for post-primary education in small island developing states (SIDS): lessons from Cape Verde. *Comparative Education* 44(2), 167-185.
- Bacchus, K. (1993). Some problems and challenges faced in decentralizing education in small states. In Kevin, M. Lillis (Ed.), *Policy, planning and management of education in small states*, pp.76-93. Paris: International Institute for Education Planning (UNESCO).
- Baldacchino, G. (1997). *Global tourism and informal labour relations: The small-scale syndrome at work*. London: Mansell.
- Baldacchino, G. (2012). Islands and Despots. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 50(1): 103 - 120.
- Borg, C., & Mayo, P (2015). Malta. An overview of European influences on educational reforms. In: T. Corner (Ed.), *Education in the European Union: Post-2003-member states* (pp. 171-192). London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bray, M. (1991). *Making small practical: The organisation and management of ministries of education in small states*. Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Bray, M. (1992). *Educational planning in small countries*. Paris, France: UNESCO, International Institute for Educational Planning.

- Bray, M., & Fergus, H. (1986). The implications of size for educational development in small countries: *Montserrat, a Caribbean case study*. *Compare* 16(1), 91-102.
- Bray, M., & Packer, S. (1993). *Education in small states: Concepts, challenges and strategies*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Briguglio, L. (1995). Small island developing states and their economic vulnerabilities. *World Development* 23(9), 1615-1632.
- Briguglio, L. (2003). The vulnerability index and small island developing states: A review of conceptual and methodological issues. In: *AIMS Regional Preparatory Meeting on the Ten-Year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action*. Praia, Cape Verde.
- Briguglio, L. (2003). The vulnerability index and Small Island developing states: A review of conceptual and methodological issues. In *AIMS Regional Preparatory Meeting on the Ten Year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action*: Praia, Cape Verde.
- Briguglio, L., Persaud, B., & Stern, R. (2006). *Toward an outward-oriented development strategy for small states: Issues, opportunities, and resilience building*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Brock, C. (1988). Beyond the fringe? Small states and the provision of education. *Comparative Education* 24(2), 167-179.
- Brock, C. (1988). Beyond the fringe? Small states and the provision of education. *Comparative Education* 24(2), 167-179.
- Caldwell, J. C., Harrison, G. E., & Quiggin, P. (1980). The demography of micro-states. *World Development*, 8(12), 953-962.
- Camilleri Grima, A. (2018). Globalization and education: What future for the Maltese-speaking child? *Educazione e Società Plurilingui*, 44, 31-43.
- Central Intelligence Agency (2018a). *CIA world factbook: Malta*. Washington, DC: CIA. Retrieved July 28, 2018 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mt.html>
- Central Intelligence Agency (2018b). *CIA world factbook: Grenada*. Washington, DC: CIA. Retrieved July 27, 2018 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gj.html>
- Clough, P. (2002). *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Commonwealth Secretariat and World Bank Task Force (2000). *Small states: Meeting challenges in the global economy*. Retrieved 20 February, 2018, from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PROJECTS/Resources/meetingchallenginglobaleconomy1.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Crossley, M., & Tikly, L. (2004). Postcolonial perspectives and comparative and international research in education: A critical introduction. *Comparative Education*, 40(2), 147-156.
- Cutajar, J. (2008). Knowledge and post-colonial pedagogy. *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, 13(2), 27-48.
- Farrugia, C.J. (1991). Malta: educational development in a small island state. *Prospects* 21(4): 584-94.
- Gruppettea, C. (2018, March 18). No, Maltese is not a foreign language. *The Sunday Times of Malta*, p.19.

- Hickling-Hudson, A. (2006). Cultural complexity, post-colonialism and educational change: Challenges for comparative educators. *Review of Education*, 52(1), 201-218.
- Hickling-Hudson, A. and Mayo, P. (2012). Editorial: Furthering the discourse in postcolonial education. *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 1(1), 1-8.
- Jules, T.D. (2010). Rethinking education in the Caribbean. *The Caribbean Examiner*, 8(2), 6- 11.
- Jules, T.D. (2012). Re-reading the Anamorphosis of educational fragility, vulnerability and strength in small states. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 15(1), 5-13.
- Kaomea, J. (2003). Reading erasures and making the familiar strange: Defamiliarizing methods for research in formerly colonized and historically oppressed communities. *Educational Researcher*, 32(2),14-25.
- Lee, Y., & Hayden, M., (2009). Early childhood care and education: Worldwide challenges and progresses. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 11(1), 3-5.
- Lowenthal, D. (1987). *Social features*. In Colin Clarke and Tony Payne (eds.) *Politics, security and development in small states*. London: Allen and Unwin. pp. 26-49.
- Lutz, W. (1994). *Population-development-environment: Understanding their interactions in Mauritius*. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.
- Massa, A. (2016, February 14). No frontrunner in race for University rector - Godfrey Baldacchino. *Sunday Times*, pp. 8 - 9.
- May, H., Kaur, B., & Prochner, L. (2016). *Empire, education and Indigenous childhoods: Nineteenth-Century missionary infant schools in three British colonies*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, P. (2014). Education for all in the Caribbean: Promise, paradox and possibility (Editorial). *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 9(1), 1-3.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York NY: Oxford University Press.
- Nieuwenhuys, O. (2013). Theorizing childhood(s): Why we need postcolonial perspectives. *Childhood*, 20(1), 3-8.
- Palmer, S. (2016). *Upstart: The case for raising the school starting age and providing what the under-sevens really need*. Edinburgh: Floris Books.
- Payler, J., & Davis, G. (2017). *Professionalism: Early years as a career*. British Educational Research Association Early Childhood Special Interest Group and TACTYC: Association for Professional Development in Early Years, 9.
- Pillay, H. & Elliott, B. (2005). Looking through old lenses to understand the emerging new world order. Implications for education reform in small island states. *Journal of Research in International Education* 4(1), 87-106.
- Prochner, L. (2009). *A history of early childhood education in Canada, Australia and New Zealand*. Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press.
- Shklovsky, V. (1965). Art as technique (L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reis, Translators.). In L. T. Lemon & M. J. Reis (Eds.), *Russian formalist criticism*, pp. 3-24. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. (Original publication date 1917).
- Sikes, P. (2003). Making the familiar strange: A new look at inequality in education. *British Journal of the Sociology of Education*, 24(2), 241-246.
- Sollars, V. (2002). *Curricula, policies and practices in early childhood education*. San Gwann, Malta: PEG.
- Spiteri, A. (2016). Developing a national quality culture for further and higher education in a micro-state: The case of Malta. *Malta Review of Educational Research*, 10(2), 297-315.

- Srebrnik, H. F. (2000). Can an ethnically-based civil society succeed? The case of Mauritius. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 18(1), 7-20.
- Srinivasan, T. N. (1986). The costs and benefits of being a small, remote, island, landlocked, or ministate economy. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 1(2), 205-218.
- Sultana, R. G. (2006). *Challenges for career guidance in small states*. Tarxien, Malta: Gutenberg Press.
- Sultana, R.G. (1997). Educational development in post-colonial Malta: Challenges for a Mediterranean micro-state. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 17(3): 335-351.
- Tarc, A. M. (2009). Post-colonial studies as re-education: Learning from J. M. Coetzee's disgrace. In: R. S. Coloma (Ed.), *Post-colonial challenges in education* (pp. 195-214). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Thiong'o, N. W. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. London: James Curry.
- Tikly, L. (1999). Post colonialism and comparative education. *International Review of Education*, 45(5/6), 603-621.
- UNESCO (2010). *World data on education* (7th ed.). Paris, France: UNESCO.
- University of Malta, (2018). *2017 Annual report*. Msida, Malta: University of Malta.
- Viruru, R. (2005a). The impact of postcolonial theory on early childhood education. *Journal of Education* 35(1): 7 - 29.
- Viruru, R. (2005b). Postcolonial theory and the practice of teacher education. In: S. Ryan & S. Grieshaber (Eds.), *Practical transformations and transformational practices: Globalization, postmodernism and early childhood education* (pp. 139-160). London: Emerald Group.
- Woodhead, M., & Moss, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Early childhood and primary education: Transitions in the lives of young children*. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Retrieved April 2, 2018 from <http://oro.open.ac.uk/16667/1/ecif2.dat.pdf.html>

Acknowledgement

The research work disclosed in this publication is partially funded by the ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme, the European Union National Fund